

Lent 2

Gafney Year W

Genesis 3:1-7, Psalm 92:1-5, 12-15, Ephesians 2:4-10, Matthew 7:15-20

Have you ever had the experience of introducing a child to a movie that you watched long ago, and being surprised by details? A particularly (hilarious?) scene involving the David statue in *Goonies* comes to mind.

Or maybe you are reading a once beloved book and you cannot believe how dated it is? Perhaps the gender stereotypes, or the heteronormativity, or the racism are suffocating.

Perhaps you have returned to a story and found that its telling was undergirded by meaning lost on you in your younger years. Mr. Rogers' invitation to Officer Clemmons to share the wading pool is significantly more moving and powerful to me now than it was when I saw it as a child.

Sometimes, then, there are tidbits we have forgotten or misremembered, or that we never fully understood. But the gifts of age and experience, and the movement of the Spirit, often birth new understandings. So let us wonder at what we might find as we visit, or revisit, this story about Adam and Eve and the garden.

We are in the middle of three weeks about Adam and Eve. We entered into Lent remembering these stories about God creating humans out of the dirt. From dirt we have come. This week we engage the story of Adam and Eve and the tree and the serpent. Next week we find Adam and Eve naked and afraid and wonder at why the story unfolds as it does.

And so I ask you: is this week's story one that felt familiar to you on first pass? Do you carry memories of hearing this story before?

What are the first three words or images that come to mind when you think about this particular story in the garden?

Apple, Satan, Sin. That is my memory of what this story holds.

And you know what is true? None of them are here.

There is a fruit tree. And a serpent. And a choice. But not an apple, and satan, and sin. It's in the reckoning in centuries of exegesis that these other patterns of reading the story have emerged.

In the scripture we heard today, in the passage laid out for us, Eve is already doing exegetical work. She is already working on processing what God has said. And we are invited in to that work in this space, and in our study.

There are three things, in particular, that have my attention.

- Though God is recorded as saying “of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day you eat from it you will surely die” - they did not die in the day they ate from the fruit, and Eve doesn't even include this “in the day part” in her report.
- And - though Eve reports that God said “you two shall not eat and not touch it,” this does not match the recorded instruction from God, which does not mention touch at all. God just says “you shall not eat.” Eve supplements that part, but also fails to describe the tree as having anything to do with the knowledge of good and evil. Here, she merely refers to it as the tree in the middle of the garden.
- The serpent both tempts Eve to misremember the story: you aren't going to die, the serpent says - and is the one to name, again the connection between this tree and the knowledge of good and evil.

And so entering this story, in the midst of work that Eve is doing, carrying centuries or wrestling that the church has done, we have the opportunity ask: are there some new things for me in this text? In the way that this story is told

I'm curious about two themes or hooks: the idea that God was discouraging the acquisition of knowledge, and the idea that the garden itself was the locus of goodness - and God.

Knowledge: this idea of knowledge is a complicated one. What, exactly, is at stake here? Did you notice that the serpent was described as possessing "naked intelligence?" That is a powerful pun there in the garden in the midst of naked Adam and naked Eve - so what undergirds that pun? Is naked intelligence something different than the knowledge of good and evil? And did you hear where the word "wise" is dropped into the passage? Eve "saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise..." Are wisdom and the knowledge of good and evil the same thing? How about wisdom and naked intelligence? Holy Scripture is full to the brim that wisdom is something to be sought, and is a gift of the Spirit. So what, exactly, is the problem here?

I don't have an answer. Just a curiosity.

And it seems that perhaps, it is curiosity that is at stake here. Good and evil, joy and grief, hope and despair - they are all a part of the landscape of beautiful lives. And one gains wisdom by being formed each. It seems to me that wisdom cannot be had without the knowledge of good and evil, that wisdom cannot be had without curiosity. Perhaps naked intelligence, that attributed to the serpent, and that which can be gained in the academy or the interwebs or even in science labs is, then, something different from wisdom. And perhaps, like an experienced soul who wishes no grief on a beautiful young spirit, God's impulse was to protect Adam and Eve?

And there are many ways to experience the fullness of God's love. But this experience is enhanced, I think, by resting in God's love in the midst of the struggle.

The Garden: Which leads to this idea that the garden itself was the locus of God's goodness. The way this story is told it seems as if everything outside of the Garden is barren and godless. But that is simply not true, is it? Even the Psalm for today gushes about the goodness of God. How great are your works, Womb of Creation! A righteous woman or man flourishes like a palm tree, and grows like a cedar in Lebanon!

Ahh, the cedars of Lebanon, those delightfully luscious and fragrant cedar trees from which the tabernacle was built!

And what of the still waters and green pastures? Those that restoreth our soul?

"The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims God's handiwork." —Psalm 19:1

The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; for he founded it on the seas and established it on the waters. Psalm 24:1-2

Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad; let the sea resound, and all that is in it. Let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them; let all the trees of the forest sing for joy. Psalm 96:11-12

Scripture clearly articulates a reverence for the luscious beauty of the natural world far outside the bounds of the garden of Eden.

And furthermore - scripture and experience both confirm that God herself inhabits the entirety of the beautiful landscape of our lives - all

that is luscious and all that is barren. There is nowhere that God is not. Everywhere that we may be, our God is present there.

In this season of Lent we walk with Jesus in the wilderness. We learn from Jesus to defy all that is death dealing in the wilderness. We learn to defy the temptations of gluttony and greed and power. We don't survive the wilderness so that we can return to God's care. We survive the wilderness because we are ever in God's care. Good and evil, joy and grief, hope and despair - they are all a part of the landscape of the beautiful lives that we co-create with the one who formed us, who hems us in behind and before.

Family of God, every good tree bears beautiful fruit. What then do we do with the tree that was a delight to Eve's eyes? We engage in the age-old work of discerning whether we are made whole by staying in the garden or traipsing through the wild and beautiful world.

This I know: God created you, and you are beautiful. God created you to bear good fruit.

So may it be.